

Secretary of Commerce for Economic Affairs; Arun Venkataraman, of the District of Columbia, to be Assistant Secretary of Commerce and Director General of the United States and Foreign Commercial Service; Mohsin Raza Syed, of Virginia, to be an Assistant Secretary of Transportation; Grant T. Harris, of California, to be an Assistant Secretary of Commerce; and Laurie E. Locascio, of Maryland, to be Under Secretary of Commerce for Standards and Technology en bloc?

The nominations were confirmed en bloc.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senate will now resume legislative session.

MORNING BUSINESS

RUSSIAN LANDMINES

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, among the many barbaric atrocities committed by Russian soldiers in Ukraine where civilian infrastructure including hospitals, schools, and apartment buildings have been repeatedly bombed and shelled and countless civilians have been summarily executed in the streets, the New York Times reports today that the Russians are using a new kind of landmine.

This mine, called the POM-3, is inherently indiscriminate like other mines in that it cannot distinguish between a civilian and a combatant, and it is apparently equipped with a sensor that triggers the explosive when a person approaches. With a kill radius of 50 feet, it is even more deadly than a typical anti-personnel mine. And, unlike typical landmines, it cannot be disarmed by a human deminer because anyone who approaches it is likely to become a victim before reaching it. So it will be necessary to use robots to clear these mines, at great additional time and expense. As in other countries affected by armed conflict, it will be many years and almost certainly decades after the fighting ends, before the people of Ukraine can walk safely without fear of mines and other unexploded ordnance.

Human beings seem to have an unlimited capacity to devise new ways of destroying the lives of others. Landmines are especially insidious because they maim or kill whoever comes into contact with them, or, in the case of the POM-3, whosever's footsteps it detects. It could be anyone, including a young child.

No matter how "sophisticated" the technology, mines are an exceedingly primitive weapon because they are designed to be indiscriminate in an age of so-called precision munitions.

Mines are the opposite. While landmines are so easy to make that it will never be possible to completely eliminate them, in 1997, the international community took an historic step,

thanks in large part to the leadership of former Canadian Foreign Minister Lloyd Axworthy and the tireless advocacy of the International Campaign to Ban landmines.

In December of that year, countries came together to sign the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production, and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on their Destruction, known informally as the Ottawa Treaty or the Mine Ban Treaty. Today, the treaty has 164 states parties. But one of the reasons anti-personnel mines have yet to be universally stigmatized is because key countries including Russia, China, India, Pakistan, and the United States have not joined the treaty.

Of course, when one country joins a treaty, it does not guarantee that others will. But the more countries that do, the harder it is for others to fail to do so, as they become the outliers, the pariahs. So if the United States, which has not used anti-personnel mines since 1991, were to join the treaty it would not guarantee that Russia would. But it would greatly enhance our credibility to call out their use of mines, their devastating effects on innocent civilians, and the need to universalize the treaty.

In 1994, President Clinton, at the United Nations, called for ridding the world of anti-personnel mines. He also directed the Pentagon to develop alternatives. They never did. While we can drive a robot on Mars 100 million miles away, our own military continues to stockpile landmines that are triggered by the victim. Whether a U.S. soldier or a child, our landmines, like Russian landmines, cannot tell the difference.

If anything good can come of this catastrophic and senseless war in Ukraine, it would be for the international community to bring to justice those responsible for war crimes and for the United States to once and for all renounce the use of anti-personnel landmines. These are not weapons that belong in the arsenals of civilized nations and certainly not in the arsenal of the most powerful, modern military on Earth. Let us be the country that not only denounces their use in Ukraine, but denounces and renounces their use everywhere. What a gift to the world that would be.

I ask unanimous consent that the New York Times article entitled "New Russian Land Mine Poses Special Risk in Ukraine" be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

[From The New York Times, April 6, 2022]
NEW RUSSIAN LAND MINE POSES SPECIAL RISK
IN UKRAINE

(By John Ismay)

WASHINGTON—Russian forces in Ukraine appear to be using a new type of weapon as they step up attacks on civilian targets: an advanced land mine equipped with sensors that can detect when people walk nearby.

Ukrainian bomb technicians discovered the device, called the POM-3, last week near the

eastern city of Kharkiv, according to Human Rights Watch, a leading human rights group, which has reviewed photos provided by Ukraine's military.

Older types of land mines typically explode when victims accidentally step on them or disturb attached tripwires. But the POM-3's seismic sensor picks up on approaching footsteps and can effectively distinguish between humans and animals.

Humanitarian deminers and groups that campaign against the use of land mines said the POM-3 would make future efforts to locate and destroy unexploded munitions in Ukraine vastly more complicated and deadlier.

"These create a threat that we don't have a response for," said James Cowan, who leads the HALO Trust, a British American charity that clears land mines and other explosive remnants of war to help countries recover after conflicts. The group began removing unexploded munitions from the Donbas region of eastern Ukraine in 2016, after Russian-backed separatists started fighting the Ukrainian government.

"We'll need to find some donors to procure robotics that can allow us to deal with these threats at some distance," Mr. Cowan added.

The POM-3 is typically launched by a rocket and falls back to earth by parachute before sticking into the ground—where it waits, according to CAT-UXO, an online resource for military and civilian bomb technicians. When the mine senses a person, it launches a small explosive warhead that detonates midair, producing fragments that are lethal up to about 50 feet away.

Mr. Cowan, a retired British Army major general, said his staff of 430 Ukrainians clearing unexploded munitions in Donbas had been unable to continue working since Russia launched a full invasion of the country in late February, with many staff members temporarily relocating in Ukraine. He anticipates that in the future, HALO's operation across the country will require about 2,500 workers, given that many areas outside Donbas are now contaminated with unexploded munitions as well.

U.S. government officials have said Russia appears to be moving troops to consolidate its hold on Donetsk and Luhansk, which could mean that even more weapons like the POM-3 will be used in the war.

"The war is entering a static phase—trenches are being dug," Mr. Cowan said. "This is the time when I would expect the Russians to start using land mines on a massive basis."

HALO, which stands for Hazardous Area Life-Support Organization, has about 10,000 employees around the world and is among the few international nonprofits that have remained in Afghanistan since the Taliban took control of Kabul, the capital, in August. Mr. Cowan said the future cleanup in Ukraine would require roughly the same number of workers as HALO's current operation in Afghanistan, which is recovering from decades of armed conflict.

The POM-3 is just one new hazard among many that his organization expects to encounter, in addition to an untold number of rockets, bombs and artillery shells that failed to detonate on impact. Russia has also attacked Ukrainian arms depots, causing fires and explosions that typically fling hundreds or even thousands of damaged munitions into surrounding areas.

Once widely used around the world, anti-personnel land mines often kill and maim civilians long after hostilities have ceased. Ukraine is one of the 164 nations that have signed a 1997 treaty banning the use of anti-personnel land mines and pledged to purge their stockpiles. The United States and Russia have refused to join it.